

## **+THE FUTURE OF MONASTICISM**

### **Chapter Talk     24 Feb. 2019   (Fr. Michael Casagram)**

What I would like to do this morning is to share some reflections that Fr Michael Casey gave us a few years ago on the future of monastic life. This fits in very well, it seems to me, with the Experiencia Project we have been asked to enter into for both the renewal our personal commitment and self-evaluation as a community.

Some of you will remember that it was back in June, 2014 that Casey gave us a series of conferences and in the final one he talked about how we can be proactive in shaping the future of monastic life in our communities. He started by recalling the fact that there have been a lot of changes in society, the Church and monastic life over the last 50-60 years. In his words, “monastic life has had to constantly adapt to changing reality” and this was and may still be a way for a monastic community to re-evaluate itself. As in the past, we too are being called to formulate a vision for the future, to hear from one another what we are seeking or aiming for by living our way of life.

With regard to monastic tradition we have an amazing amount of resources now available to us. While with us back in 2014, Casey was impressed by our own monastic section in the library. He thought in general our monasteries are well equipped but the key is taking the time to read what is available in such a way that it becomes our own. He felt that in our own time there is a real craving for what monastic life has to offer in terms of spiritual experience if we can only make it more accessible to those who come here to witness our life.

As an Order or Institution we have three main responsibilities, 1) Reclaiming our monastic spirituality, 2) Re-instating the mysticism at the heart of our way of life and finally, 3) Honoring and accepting leadership functions within it.

Reclaiming our monastic spirituality is much more than celebrating the past, It is rather engaging the present. Our life is a community way of life that is both formative and transformative. In fact I think many of us experience this on a daily basis by the way our life calls us beyond ourselves into a growing love of Christ. The quality of our community life is what invigorates us as often as we allow grace to have the upper hand. We find ourselves, having often to make decisions as to how best to use our time and energy for the good of all.

Our daily practice lends a fresh quality to the whole of community life, whether this be our readiness to participate in the Divine Office, putting others' needs before our own, really taking time each day to engage in Lectio Divina or personal prayer. This means allowing ourselves to be called beyond our own personal preferences and if we are attentive as we do so, we begin to see that this is where authentic freedom lies, where we are caught up into God's very own inner divine life.

All day long really, we have opportunities to check on our readiness to enter into this divine design by reviewing our practice of silence, our use of food, our living the vow of chastity, learning to live simply, practicing truthfulness in everyday circumstances and any number of other monastic virtues familiar to us from the Rule. We don't lack means for evaluating the quality of our monastic asceticism if only we make a conscious effort to use them.

Michael Casey thought we need not be afraid of reclaiming the mystical dimension of our life. We may easily dismiss this aspect but it is really at the heart of the life. Our life is a very practical life, designed in such a way that we may truly live the gospel all day long in the most humble of circumstances. Often enough we have the wrong idea of mysticism as something extraordinary when it is to enfold every aspect of our lives. God wants us to allow grace to pervade the whole of our lives. Casey quotes the famous line from Karl Rahner to the effect that the Christian of the future will be a mystic or not a Christian at all. Our life often has very little support from society that is living from a very different set of priorities or values. A genuine vocation to our life is expansive and belongs to a different sphere of human experience. We have a deeply spiritual set of values that form the inner focus of our lives.

Finally Casey gets into the importance of leadership. Our understanding of leadership has evolved in recent years. Leadership is really about the ability to communicate moral energy. He used St Bernard as a model of one who had the ability to motivate for change, someone who could inspire beliefs and values that are appropriate for a given community. The importance of teaching by word and example play a major role as motivating influences. The monastic life will be deeply experienced only if its values are internalized. Michael Casey has been published in the American Benedictine Review precisely on this topic if anyone is interested in his thinking about leadership in community.

Related to this role of leadership in community is how our monastic communities assist one another. This certainly is what Fr Elias is very involved with right now at Mepkin abbey in assisting with the Regional Meeting. We can assist and learn a lot from one another's experience. An so I bring these reflections to a close and hope that we as a community can reflect more carefully on our own experience of monastic life, share this with one another and possibly with others in the Order.